Chapter 3:

Setting Goals/Developing a Plan of Action

If your project is going to succeed, it will need to have clearly defined goals and objectives. Goals help keep stakeholders and volunteers on track and motivated. If your goals and objectives are clearly defined, it is much easier to evaluate your progress to determine if you have achieved them or not.

The terms *goals* and *objectives* are often used interchangeably, but there is a useful distinction between them. *Goals* are the over-arching, long-term "endpoints" of the project. They are the things that answer the question: "What do we want to ultimately accomplish with this project?" For instance, the goal of the Indiana Wetlands Conservation Plan (IWCP) is to:

Conserve Indiana's remaining wetland resources, as defined by acreage, type, and function, and restore and create wetlands where opportunities exist to increase the quality and quantity of wetland resources.

Goals are broad and usually long-term. They are not things that you are going to accomplish by next week.

Objectives tend to be more concrete and specific in nature. They should answer the question: "What, specifically, will be accomplished in order to achieve the long-term goal?" Objectives are often (though not always) short-term. One of the objectives of the IWCP was to "Increase the number of focus area projects in Indiana." Completion of this objective helps contribute to the achievement of the larger, over-arching goal listed above.

Actions are the specific things that are accomplished to achieve objectives and ultimately, goals. One of the actions listed in the IWCP was to "...develop a *Wetlands Focus Area Sourcebook* that provides guidelines for forming focus area projects."

It is important to create realistic goals and objectives. A goal, by nature, can be lofty and long-term; however, you do not want to make it unachievable. Realistic objectives are even more important. Sometimes, the energy and enthusiasm of a newly formed project can cause the stakeholders to create objectives that are simply not achievable. Over time, the inability of the project to achieve these unrealistic objectives can lead to a loss of interest among stakeholders, or a general feeling that the project was not successful. It is better to set specific, achievable objectives that can be broadened and expanded as needed.

As your project progresses, it is important to evaluate your goals, objectives, and actions, and adapt them to your changing needs and resources. Objectives can be broad or very specific depending on the nature of the project. It is important that your stakeholders know and understand which goals are short-term, which are long-term, and which are ongoing for the life of the project. It is also important to determine if your goals will require additional funding or community support.

As mentioned above, some objectives may extend throughout the life of the project. For example, if you want to educate every resident in the community about good land use practices, you will need to continually educate new landowners as they move into the community. Today's society is very mobile–people are constantly moving into and out of any given area. That means that education programs must be ongoing to keep new community members informed and involved. Even in areas that have relatively stable populations, a mechanism is needed for periodically reaching out to community members to keep them informed about the project and its successes. Sending out a periodic newsletter is one means of keeping the community informed. Always invite the local media to important meetings and field days. Remember, you want the public to hear about the progress your project is making! With media attention, you also can recruit new volunteers and partners.

Here are a few example project scenarios that can result from your planning process:

- If you live in an urban area where a wetland provides some of the only green space, you might work to conserve it for its intrinsic recreational and/or educational values.
- If the wetland was historically important to local anglers in the community, you might decide to protect it for its recreational values. If it is now too polluted to provide habitat for healthy fish, you might make restoring fish habitat the primary goal of your project.
- If the wetland is a popular site for birding and nature watching, you may decide to make it accessible to other members of the community. You could erect a bulletin board to provide information about the wetland and build interpretive nature trails. These activities would expand its recreational and educational value to the community.
- If the wetland is partially drained or otherwise has been modified in the past, you could develop a plan to restore the wetland and return its full values to the community.

In addition, your wetlands stewardship program may set some or all of the following objectives:

Short-term Objectives and Actions

Objective:	Increase the number of volunteers to help work in wetlands.
Action:	Hold an "Introduction to Wetlands" workshop and sign up volunteers to be wetlands stewards.
Objective:	Improve wetland habitat.
Action:	Hold a trash cleanup and a wetland planting day.
Objective:	Inform local landowners about your project.
Action:	Erect a sign at the entrance of the wetland explaining your stewardship program.
Objective:	Inform the community about your project.
Action:	Establish a "Wetlands Stewardship Day" in your community to focus attention on the importance of wetlands.
Objective:	Inform the public about wetlands and wetland values.
Action:	Develop a self-guided tour map of the wetland area.

Long-term Objectives and Actions

Objective:	Gather scientific information about a particular wetland.
Action:	Develop a volunteer monitoring strategy to provide trend data about the wetland.
Objective:	Educate every seventh grader in the county about wetland ecology.
Action:	Create a long-term stewardship program and outdoor classroom for the wetland.
Objective:	Inform the public about wetlands and wetland values.
Action:	Build a self-guided, interpretive boardwalk around the wetland. Design a community park incorporating the wetland area. Develop and distribute an annual report detailing your monitoring efforts and distribute it to local government officials, the media, etc. Develop a recreation area for residents. Develop a wildlife area.
Objective:	Increase the flood control and water quality capabilities of your community.
Action:	Purchase and restore x acres of wetlands in the area.
Objective:	Improve the health of your wetland ecosystem.
Action:	Eradicate the undesirable invasive species from the area.

Once you have determined your goals, objectives, and actions, you should develop a timeline and assignments for them. In other words, who is going to do the work and by when? It is critical to make assignments and try to stick to them. The more specific you can be, the better. And remember to evaluate your program continually to keep projects on track. Here are some questions you should pose periodically to your group:

1. Have we created realistic goals and objectives?
2. What actions need to be taken to accomplish them?
3. Do these goals and objectives reflect the community's wants and needs?
4. Is the timeline we have set to accomplish these goals realistic?

The Limberlost Experience – Objectives For Restoration

Limberlost Pilot Focus Area Coordinator Ken Brunswick reflects on how his focus area achieved its restoration goals and how, looking back, he would do some things differently.

The original Limberlost Swamp covered approximately 13,000 acres. Most of it has now been drained and converted to farmland. But because many of these farmed wetlands are poorly drained, crops are often lost due to high water levels. One of the objectives of the Limberlost Focus Area was to purchase 400 acres of local wetlands and flooded farm fields. We found landowners who were willing to sell us their land because they had difficulty producing crops on those areas. We were fortunate to have several members on our focus area team who had the expertise to move us through the entire process of acquiring land for restoration.

One difficulty we had was with the length of time it took to complete the purchase of land that was signed into the Wetlands Reserve Program. These purchases took several years to be completed–a time frame that the selling landowners were not expecting. Landowners need to be prepared for these longer processes, since they are accustomed to buying and selling land in terms of months rather than years. If you plan to use these government programs and processes, be sure to ask the landowners if they are prepared to work with your organization for several years.

From the beginning, we knew we were working with a potentially huge wetland area, but we took small parcels that could be successfully restored one at a time. It's best to begin a restoration project with a small area (to "get your feet wet," so to speak). We also recommend starting with an area that will be high profile, meaning something that looks like a wetland to everyone. Because people expect a wetland to have standing water, a wetland type that will have visible water should be the first area that you restore. This makes your project "look successful" to the typical onlooker. If your objective is to restore a wetland type that does not have a lot of water, make this fact a big part of your education campaign–explain to people why it doesn't "look like a wetland." Wetland types that have visible water include marshes, prairie potholes, and wet meadows. All are relatively quick restorations that begin "looking like wetlands" almost immediately. Once the restoration is completed, you have an excellent example that everyone can recognize as a wetland.

The Limberlost Focus Area has exceeded its original objective of 400 acres for wetland restorations, and we are now in the process of re-evaluating our objectives for the future.

Canada goose goslings